

Trinity 7 (2025)

Faith is a journey, not a destination.

Those of us who have been here at St. Luke's for any length of time know this from experience.

Every time we have seemed to have arrived; God has beckoned us to keep moving.

I remember the first service in this building on Easter Day 1995. Years of praying, dreaming and collecting aluminium cans (the proceeds from which went into the building fund) had paid off. We could at last rest.

It wasn't to be. Not too many years later two lots next door to the church became available. After much deliberation and with the sacrificial giving of many, the property was purchased. Now, we could rest.

No so. A consensus soon developed that the church needed to be enlarged. In 2011, it was. It seemed we had finally arrived.

We had not. New challenges and opportunities continued to arise and present themselves. Most recently, it was creating a childcare room downstairs . . . and we are still on the move.

Such is the way of life. A person who no longer moves is dead. The same is true of a church.

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Abraham found this principle to be true in his life.

As this morning's Old Testament reading opens, the patriarch had arrived at one of these plateaus of ease.

After years of moving, he was in the land of promise and at peace with his Canaanites neighbours.

More than that, he was doing well financially. He had lots of herds of livestock. He and Sarah were not having to rely on Social Security to put food on the table.

But, most importantly of all, the heir for which he had waited so long had arrived and was on his way to manhood.

Needless to say, Isaac was the apple of his dad's eye. In today's passage, we are told Abraham loved him.

What is significant about this statement is that it is the first time in the Bible we find the concept of love expressed.

At this point, you almost feel like rounding off Abraham's story with the words, "And the 'Abrahams' lived happily ever after."

But not so. In Genesis 22, the chapter from which today's reading comes, a new challenge arises.

God does the unthinkable. He commands Abraham to sacrifice the son he loved.

Abraham's response to this test is one of trusting obedience.

Let me pause here and ask: From where did this trusting obedience come? ////

I want to suggest it came from having undergone many earlier, smaller tests.

From these, Abraham had learned God could be trusted, yes, even with that one he loved above all else, his son.

He believed verily God was going to do what He had promised . . . raise up to him through Isaac a family that would exceed in number the stars of heaven.

More than that, if necessary, Abraham believed that God could raise the dead. After all, He had already done something very much like that when He had brought back life to Sarah's dead womb and had allowed her to conceive and bare Isaac.

Here is where I am going with this: Small challenges enabled him (and I want to suggest us) to meet larger ones.

I wonder if you have found that to be so in your life?

One who has had to face no challenges is of all men to be most pitied.

The young person, for example, who is given everything, who never has had to struggle, is often ill equipped for life, is an emotional cripple. In a way, he or she has been cheated.

The tests God sends, therefore, should not be resented but embraced.

They are not for our destruction, but for our salvation. They are intended to stretch our faith and ultimately to prepare us for heaven.

“It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I may learn thy statutes,” says the Psalmist (119:71).

Why not look back in your life and see if you can find some examples of what I am talking about . . . tests which made you a stronger, better and perhaps a more compassionate person?

Give thanks to God for these, but also, as you do, thank Him for walking with you through these challenges, for never forsaking you.

As you look back, I think you will find what Abraham found: **The God who tests also provides.**

Before I pass on, allow me to say a word about human sacrifices. Perhaps you recoiled as you heard in our reading that it was God who told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. You said: “How could a just and good God do such a thing?” /// Here is my take on the matter.

All around Abraham were people who practiced human sacrifice as part of their religious cult. So, it was pretty ‘normal’ for that culture and time. It would not have shocked Abraham as it shocks us.

More than that, the test God put before Abraham should in no wise be construed as an endorsement of this practice. Quite the opposite. On Mount Mariah God put a giant X mark through this practice. He stops Abraham's hand as he prepared to carry it out. As the passage ends, God provides a substitute, a ram caught in a thicket. ///

Moving on, there is typology here as well. What I mean by typology is that Isaac is a type of Christ. He goes willingly up the mount and submits to being sacrificed. He is a willing victim.

That is what Jesus did 2000 years later on the same mount. He mounted Mount Calvary to deal with your sins and mine . . . indeed, the sins of the whole world . . . to be our substitute.

Don't miss this typology. Look to the cross and see the perfect sacrifice and say, "God loved me this much."

I don't suppose anyone will ever fully understand what took place on the cross . . . the 'how' of this transaction.

At the end the day perhaps hymnwriter Harry W. Farrington said it best:

*I know not how that Calvary's cross
a world from sin could free;
I only know its matchless love
has brought God's love to me.*

To me *and countless others.*

Before I close, allow me to point you to a very practical application we find in today's passage. It is this: **Abraham's test, which is to lay before God what is most dear, comes to each one of us.**

God tells us to throw that thing down.

Why does God ask us to do this? To break us? To make us miserable?

No. It is so He can give that thing back, purified, renewed and re-invigorated with power . . . with all traces of self-conceit removed.

It is the paradox Jesus set before the people of His day: **“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”**

We all have “Isaacs” in our lives. Often these are things that give us status and our identity.

For a rector, it might be his collar.

For a doctor, it might be his stethoscope.

For a plumber, his wrench.

For the man of wealth, his black credit card.

The God we meet in Jesus says: Throw whatever it is down.

Throw it down so He may give it back restored and purified. So it may become an instrument of help to others and ultimately a source of eternal rather than temporal joy.

Who or what is your ‘Isaac’? /// Whatever it is say, with the hymn writer:

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.*

I surrender all . . .

This ‘throwing down’ and surrendering what is most precious to us is not something we do once and then move on. No, it’s a life-long process. New ‘idols’ have a way of keep showing up in our lives. They are like weeds in a garden. ///

In closing, remember: Faith is a journey, not a destination.